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JAMES NACHTWEY/BLOCK STAR

The Director: Running the C.I.A.

Joseph Lelyveld's article on William Casey's stewardship of American intelligence correctly describes my efforts to improve the collection and validation of intelligence information ("The Director: Running the C.I.A." (Jan. 20). The article does not mention that every one of my objectives came to be shared by the majority of both Congressional intelligence committees and that their initiation became part of the Congress's authorization of the intelligence budget for the 1985 fiscal year.

Having done a tolerable job of explaining my position, the article then describes me as "far right." By what standard do you apply the label "far" to me and not to Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, whom you mention as my counterpart? More important, how do you justify placing into an ideological framework reforms of American intelligence that

were conceived and passed solely on their merit? The real line of demarcation in intelligence matters today is not so much between liberals and conservatives as between those who are disposed uncritically to accept the intelligence bureaucracy's self-serving nostrums and those who compare requirements with performance.

Mr. Lelyveld's article reflects the bureaucracy's view that all is essentially well with American intelligence today. In fact, much of what we gather and even more of what we produce is literally stuff that we can do nothing with, or about. Meanwhile, we are not even trying to get information or do analyses on matters that, in conflict, would make the difference between life and death for many Americans. There is also almost no competition in analysis today.

In sum, the issues involved go far beyond the glamour of covert action, and are infinitely more complex than the article ever leads the reader to suspect. Your readers would be better served by restraining your zeal for sticking invidious labels on people who try to reform bureaucracy.

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Although the President can choose the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the other top C.I.A. officials are career men who've been a part of this "fraternitylike" organization through many administrations. Mr. Lelyveld's article would have us believe that every four years these professional intelligence agents redirect their priorities and goals to suit the new Administration. But these men are the very sources who keep the President, and their own director, informed as to why and where defenses are needed and deployed. Are we to believe that their own bias doesn't prevail in how, and even when, the reports are delivered? Is it not then these unelected men, not the President, who determine C.I.A. activities internally and abroad?

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